Interview with W. Garth Thorburn

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project Agriculture Series

W. GARTH THORBURN

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Q: Today is Monday, January 16th, 2006. We are in Sarasota, Florida. This is Allan Mustard of the Foreign Agricultural Service and I'm with Garth Thorburn, sitting on the front drive of his house in Florida, here in the middle of January. It's supposed to hit 72 degrees today, which is much better than Moscow.

Garth, for the oral history project, could you please talk a bit about how you got where you are, or where you were when you in FAS (Foreign Agricultural Service). And let's start with your education, where you grew up, your connection with agriculture, how you became an agricultural attach# and counselor.

THORBURN: I was born in New York in 1928. When I was three, my mother took my brother, my sister and me to Jamaica. We each stayed in Jamaica until we were 18, except for my brother, who was drafted in Jamaica and spent four years in the American Army in Puerto Rico.

When my sister was 18, she came up to the States and lived with my mother. When I finished high school in Jamaica, which was Wolmer's Boys School, it was December of 1945. I came up to the United States in May of 1946 when I turned 18. I goofed around in

New York City for about a year, then my mother said, “You have to go to work or you have to go to college.”

At that time, I really did not know what to do, but my maternal grandfather had a farm near Highgate, and I decided that maybe I should take agriculture and go back and run the family farm. I applied to Cornell University and I would not be accepted the fall semester, but the spring semester. So I asked my stepfather if he knew any universities or colleges that I could go to, and he suggested Hampton Institute, which is now Hampton University.

We called one of the associate professors there and she suggested that I come down and take the entrance exam, which I did. I fully expected to spend maybe a year there and then transfer into Cornell, but as it turned out, they had super agricultural facilities. The classes were small, 13 to 18 people, as far as agricultural aspect was concerned. So I decided to stay on.

I finished the course in 1951, and in 1951, the Newport News Shipyard decided they would experiment with taking colored people to work in the shipyard, and the union came to the institute and asked if any of the students would like to work there on late shifts, so I decided that, in my senior year, I would work in Newport News Shipyard from 4:00 to 12:00 at night.

At that time, the Korean War was on, and I kept getting notices every two weeks that you're going to be drafted next week, next week, next week. It didn't happen, so in march of '52, I went and signed up for two years. During my tenure in the Army, I had the opportunity to go to the Information and Education School in Fort Slocum, New York. And when I came back to my unit in Camp Rucker, Alabama, after six or seven months, I was promoted to staff sergeant, and I was in charge of the information and education at the division in Camp Rucker, Alabama.

During that period of time, I saw notices about agricultural economists, government notices that had been posted on the board, and I decided to go up to Montgomery, Alabama, and

take the exam. I went up there in March. I took the exam, apparently passed, because when I got out of the Army in March of 1954, I had reemployment rights, and I went back to Newport News Shipyard.

While I was there, I got a call from the office saying that somebody from Washington was calling me. I said, “Oh, okay, I'll go and talk to them.” So I went and I spoke to Arnold Beasley, who was the personnel director at that time, and he said, “I have sent you some forms that I'd like you to fill out. And I said, “Well, I haven't received anything.”

He said, “Are you interested in being interviewed for a position in the newly formed Foreign Agricultural Service.” I said yes, so he sent me another set of forms, so a couple of days later, both sets of forms came. On it, it said do not give up your job. You are coming up to Washington for an interview, so I went up, I had the interview, and I came back to Newport News Shipyard, and about three or four weeks later I was called to come up to Washington for a position.

At that time, Foreign Agricultural Service was in the process of hiring JPs, junior professionals. Ten junior professionals were hired. I happened to have been one.

Q: Who were the others?

THORBURN: The others were Norman Pettipaw, Ivan Gilbert, Alden Nickerson, Larry Thomasson, Fred Traeger, Ray Brown, who did not stay with FAS, a couple others, but I can't recall their names at this particular point.

When I got to Washington, I was assigned to the Regional Analysis Division, and my branch chief was Wilhelm Anderson. I worked with Dr. Anderson for two years, and at that time I was informed by Clayton Whipple, who was the associate administrator, that I was going to be reassigned to Paris, France, as the third agricultural officer there.

During my tenure with Dr. Anderson, I discovered that he didn't care whether I was black, blue or green. None of the other branch chiefs or division directors would hire me. He was a Norwegian, so he said, the guy is qualified, I'll take him. That's how I got that job. When I was assigned, my area officer was Horace Bolster, and I went up to see him, because we were supposed to get an orientation program.

Horace told me, he said, “I don't think you're ready to go overseas. If I had anything to do with it, you wouldn't go.” I said, “Well, do you have anything to do with it?” He said, “No.” I said, “Well, would you schedule my program?”

So the program was scheduled, and I left for Paris in June of 1956. I went to Paris and my principal officer was Paul George Minneman. He had a PhD from, I think, Ohio State, the first PhD that Ohio State gave in agricultural economics. He had served with OFAR (Office of Foreign Agricultural Relations) with the State Department and was one of the officers, senior officers, who decided to come to FAS rather than stay with State Department.

He was an excellent leader. I learned a lot from him. He was a good economist, had a good sense of duty. I spent five years there, then I was transferred to Sao Paulo, Brazil, as the agricultural officer in Sao Paulo.

Q: Could we stop in Paris for just a minute, because, of course, you were in Paris at the time when the European Coal and Steel Community was being formed, and there was a lot going on at that time to try to make sure that France and Germany would never go to war again, and the seeds were planted for what later grew into the European Community and then the European Union. Could you talk a little bit about what you were doing at that time and how events were unfolding that led up to the trade disputes we've had since then, since you left, with the European Community and European Union.

THORBURN: Well, my job as the third person, third officer, in the attach# office, was to gather trade statistics and to do reporting. Paul Minneman was basically responsible for

policies and working with the Ministry of Agriculture and the foreign office as far as trade programs were concerned. We went through a very difficult transition period, and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) was headquartered in Paris at that time. General De Gaulle came in as president and didn't like that, so I think NATO was transferred to Brussels.

We had a lot of civil unrest and there were demonstrations on the Champs Elyse#s and at the Assemblee nationale at that time. Basically, though, I was not too involved in policies as far as the question that you just posed.

Q: So then you went to Sao Paulo?

THORBURN: I went to Sao Paulo as the agricultural officer there, and as you know, Brazil is larger than the continental United States, so we had a lot of ground to cover, and fortunately I had to go up to the northeast of Brazil because I was relegated to certain commodities, and a lot of what I was doing was in Paran# and Sao Paulo. That was coffee. And then in the northeast there was sisal and cocoa and things like that that I had to cover from both areas.

To me, that was a good learning experience. It was just myself and the secretary, so I had to get my Portuguese in shape, travel around, talk with people, get to know people, and it was very, very, very interesting. I had one thing that I think of all the time. I was driving up to the northeast with an assistant from Rio who was supposed to replace me when I left. His name was Abner Deathridge. And we had a little bit of difficulty on the trip, but these things happen.

But, anyway, I got to near Recife and it was very, very dark, and we were lost, so we stopped and I asked someone where can I find the main road in order to get to Recife? And he said something that stuck in my mind, Via at# ao fim do mundo, e depois pega

esguerda. Go to the end of the earth, and then turn left. So I went to the end of the earth and I turned left. I got on the main road, and I got to Recife.

That particular assignment was very, very good for me, because I learned to run a small office by myself. I learned to do my reporting. I got to know a lot of good contacts that I used later on when I went to Brazil as the agricultural attach#.

After that assignment, I went to Washington and I was branch chief for special studies in the Sugar and Tropical Products Division under Dr. John Kross. I spent two years there. We had a lot of work to do, going to conferences in Rome and Geneva. We were setting up agreements in cocoa and coffee at that particular time. After that assignment was finished two years, I went to Colombia as the agricultural attach#. That was a very interesting time. I almost got kidnapped there.

I was doing the sugar report. I had called people in Medell#n and I tried to get some information. I couldn't get it. So I told my wife, I'm going to go to the airport and I'm going to buy a ticket and see if I can go down to Medell#n, which I did. I flew down, spoke to the sugar people, came back that night.

When I got back, my wife said, “You need to call somebody.” And I called that person, who said, “You need to get out of town. If you had been at Hotel Tekendama today at 11:00, and you usually go there, buy a milkshake and an empanada, you would have been kidnapped.” So I called one of my assistants. I got in our official car, and I drove down to the plains, spent two weeks down there, and then came back to Bogot#.

A lot of things transpired. We had guards at the gate and one day my son came out and said to the guard, “What are you doing out here?” And they said to him, “Oh, somebody wants to kidnap your father, so we're here to protect him,” so that scared my son to death, but these things happen. At that particular time, I was assigned to Brasilia, so I took a direct transfer and I went to Brasilia as the agricultural attach#.

I had a two-year tour there. It was kind of topsy-turvy, eventful, because I eventually got a divorce from my wife. I went to Washington, and after a hiatus of about three months, clowning around, I was assigned as the director of the Sugar and Tropical Products Division.

Q: So you were a GS-15 (General Schedule 15) at that point?

THORBURN: I was a GS-15 at that point.

Q: When you were the section chief in Brazil, were you a GS-14?

THORBURN: I was a GS-15.

Q: Fifteen in Brazil, okay.

THORBURN: I got my 15 when I was in Bogot#.

Q: Okay.

THORBURN: We at that time really did a lot of traveling to Rome and Geneva and London, because we were working on the same international agreementcoffee, sugar, tea and all of those things. So I went to North Africa, I went to West Africa, because coffee and cocoa were grown in those areas. And I met with the people who we usually meet with when we go to Rome or Geneva to set up the quotas for these various agreements.

Q: Could you talk about the agreements for a bit, about why we got into the agreements, what they were intended to do and to what degree, in your view, they were successful?

THORBURN: Okay, the two most important ones in my view were coffee and cocoa. There was an overproduction of coffee at that time, according to world estimates, and we were setting up quotas whereby certain countries could export X coffee and retain Y in their storage facilities. And since the market was X+Y+Z, we had to allocate, and then we got

into, “Well, I produce more coffee than that country produces, and I should have a larger quota,” and we went back and forth. This is why, before we went to the meetings, I would go to the Ivory Coast, I'd go to Colombia, and we would try and examine exactly how much coffee they did produce, how much they did store, et cetera, et cetera.

Q: So the USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) estimates became very important, because the host country governments had an incentive to inflate their figures.

THORBURN: Amen to that. As a matter of fact, one of the times I went to Colombia, just before we would meet in Rome, and we discovereI was traveling around with the local FSN (Foreign Service national) and we discovered that what the Colombians were doing, they were taking coffee from one storage unit to put it in another storage unit when they knew we were going to be there. We had to go back and say, “Well, no, no, you moved this coffee from there.” Because what the FSN and I did, when we went to one of these places, we would mark one of the bags and if it showed up at another place, we knew what was going on.

We worked with the State Department and Commerce, so that there were usually three of us representing the U.S. government at these meetings. After that, I was assigned to Nigeria, the armpit of Africa is what it's called. I spent three and a half years there, and it was probably the most difficult assignment that I had. I covered Cameroon and Ghana from Nigeria, and it was eye opening, to say the least. It was a good three and a half years. Two of my children were born when we were in Nigeria. And fortunately, they weren't born in Nigeria. After Nigeria, I was transferred to India and I spent seven and a half years in India as the agricultural counselor.

Q: Could we go back to Nigeria a bit? What were the things that really made it difficult in Nigeria, and what kind of impact did things like the corruption in Nigeria, or just the general difficulty with doing business in Nigeria? Could you talk about it a little bit and how you coped with it?

THORBURN: Okay. Living facilities. We had a three-bedroom house which the government had to pay $100,000 a year for the lease, and we had to have a three-year lease in advance, so we put up $300,000 to begin with. The Canadians used to run the electric power facilities. The Nigerians decided they would do it themselves, so when we got there, you could hardly count on having electricity in the house. If you were going to have a reception, you would have to go to the substation, pay someone about 40 naira in order to please have the light on at my house from 7:00 to 9:00 at night. So we had to do that.

That was also with the telephones. If we wanted to make a telephone call, we had to go to the substation, pay somebody five or 10 naira, and they would run the call through for you. As a matter of fact, they would run the call through, and when the call was finished, they would call the central station and say, “The call didn't go through, so please cancel that,” but you still had to pay them 10 naira.

Food. It was 25 percent hardship and 25 percent differential. You paid about $6 for a dozen eggs, and they looked like pigeon eggs. Lettuce was about $3 or $4 a head, with three or four leaves of wilted stuff, and, in general, it was rather difficult to work, to get wholesome food. We used to have a storage unit where the embassy brought in certain items and stored it, and then we could buy it. The Nigerian government said that that was not right, so we had to close that storage unit.

Going from Lagos to the airport took anywhere from 30 minutes to five hours, so you had no idea whether you were going to catch the plan, if the plane came in. In the north, when we were flying into the north, we would fly into one of the towns up north and we were coming back to Lagos or wherever we were going, we'd see a plane coming in. You'd grab your bags, you'd run on the tarmac, and that might not be your plane, so you'd have to turn around and go back and wait for the next plane. It was pretty difficult.

We used to drive from Lagos over to Ghana, and we went through two very small ex-French countries that were ruled by France.

Q: Former colonies?

THORBURN: Former colonies. And we would love to go there, because we would drive and we would get fresh cheese and some fresh bread. It was just wonderful. The only problem is you have to get through the Nigerian border, then the Dahomey border, and then the other border, and then leave that border and get into Ghana, and Ghana at that time was in a very, very, very bad situation. But, anyway, it was nice to get out of Nigeria to visit some other country. It was an interesting, trying time.

Q: What were your major responsibilities in Nigeria? What were we doing in Nigeria at that point?

THORBURN: Well, I covered the Cameroon and Ghana, and Ghana was at that time the largest producer of cocoa in the world. It isn't now. They just flubbed everything. They produced coffee in Nigeria, and in the Cameroon. Nigeria was a good market for parboiled rice, and Uncle Ben had a rep there, so what we were trying to do basically was expand our markets in Nigeria, particularly. We had some success until the Thai and parboiled rice hit our markets there.

I had a couple food shows. They didn't work very well, because a lot of the stuff came in, and by the time it came through customs and came through storage, half of it was destroyed and rotted and stuff like that. But that's what we were trying to do, really open those markets. What we were basically trying to do, I think, in the agriculture sector was to try and establish good relationships with the Ministry of Agriculture, and I think to some extent we were successful. Many of the people in agriculture, including the principal secretary, had graduated from universities in the United States.

We had an entr#e there, but it was so corrupt and the politicians, I mean, it was just unbelievable. It was a learning experience and you do the best you can under difficult circumstances.

Q: So, from there, you went on to New Delhi.

THORBURN: I went to Delhi.

Q: And how was that? What were you doing in New Delhi?

THORBURN: Delhi was very, very good, very interesting. When I got there, we were assigned, we covered Nepal and Sri Lanka as well. I went up to Nepal a couple of times, and I didn't think it was useful, because there was really nothing going on there, and they had a very good AID (Agency for International Development) mission. So if I needed information, I called.

I was trying to increase our exports to India in the '60s and '70s when we had PL (Public Law) 480, India imported a lot of wheat from us. But they came up with some good programs of their own and produced a lot of wheat and rice. They weren't self-sufficient, but with the low intake of calories, they were at their level, maybe 1,500 calories a day, and if you see some of the Indians with their concave chests, you know that they aren't well fed.

We tried very, very hard with certain thingsoybean, wheat, nuts. We had a very, very interesting group of people whom we sent to California to buy almonds and pistachios from the United States, and it turned out to be very, very successful. We monitored very, very closely the monsoons, because the size of the crops, the major crops, pulses, wheat and rice, dependent upon rainfall. Monitoring it, we had a very good idea when they would have a shortfall.

One year, I can't remember exactly when, probably in '88, they had a short crop of wheat and we managed to export about 1.5 million tons of wheat at $250 a ton if I remember, so we did pretty well that year. I think that year, we probably did about $1 billion of exports to India. I had an excellent staff and I was very, very, very satisfied with my time there, as I spent seven and a half years there. When you spend seven and a half years anyplace, it's enjoyable.

Q: You talked a little bit about what it was like getting around the country and flying versus driving. Could you talk about that a little bit for the oral history?

THORBURN: Well, most people liked to visit the Taj Mahal, and that was not too bad a drive, but you took your life into your hands if you did that. As a matter of fact, the secretary of state came to visit and some of our people went down to accompany him, and on the way back, five or six were killed in an automobile accidenof our embassy staff. So you just take your life into your hands if you drive anywhere in India.

Making trips to Kerala, Tamil Nadu, to Calcutta, anywhere, we would fly from Delhi to that city, rent a car, go out into the boondocks and visit in order to gather information to make estimates of what's going on. But driving in India was worse than driving in Rome. It was unbelievable and terrible.

Q: So, after India, then you transferred on?

THORBURN: I was transferred to Turkey for three and a half years, and that was my last assignment in the Foreign Service.

Q: And that's where we met.

THORBURN: That is where we met. You were in Istanbul and I was in Ankara. And that was an eye opener, because growing up in the West Indies, where we learn a lot about British history and the British Empire, and I learned a lot about what's happening in

Greece, et cetera, I didn't learn too much about Turkey. And Turkey turned out to be very fascinating from a historical point of view. Things in Turkey were just an eye opener to me, and from a work standpoint, it was fascinating, and from a culture standpoint and exposure to another culture, I think it was unbelievably good.

Q: Well, at the time that we were in Turkey, that was when Turgut Ozal was prime minister, and of course he was taking the Turkish economy in a whole new direction at that point. Could you talk a little bit, maybe, about that and then maybe also talk about the ambassadors that you worked for?

THORBURN: Well, we worked witI can't remember the name of the organization, where they imported stuff from us, the wheat.

Q: TMO.

THORBURN: TMO.

Q: TMO, the Turkish Soil Products Office.

THORBURN: We worked with TMO, and it was a very good organization. I had very close relations with the head of TMO, and we did a lot of market development. We actually did some CCC (Commodity Credit Corporation) there with rice. We got some rice in from the United States. We got some wheat in from the United States. We started with the tobacco organization and you know about that. We managed to get some full-cured Virginia tobacco into the country so that they could make a cigarette similar to Marlboro.

Q: Yes, that was the Tekel 2000, the Tekel Ikibin.

THORBURN: And we had a little bit of problem with that because it came in under CCC, and somebody reported to someone in Washington that something was funny there, and one of the guy's from the inspector general's office came over and we had to open some of thI think we called them hogsheads. And we had to open to them to make sure that it

was Virginia full-cured tobacco. And after opening about four or five of the things, the guy who was the manager said, “Look, this is our stuff. Please don't open anymore.” So we stopped. But we had some problems there.

Generally speaking, here again, the minister of agriculture was a political appointee, but everybody at the echelon below that went to USC (University of Southern California) or some other U.S. agricultural university, so we had good rapport with most of the people in the Ministry of Agriculture.

Q: Well, I remember there was one undersecretary we had a problem with that involved the Cochran Program. Do you want to talk about that?

THORBURN: As a matter of fact, he was a graduate of USC, and it was kind of difficult to figure out why he was giving us problems. The Cochran Program actually was a very, very good program, and a lot of the people who went to the United States on the program came back and it helped a great deal. I don't think I was ever able to figure out why he gave us problems.

Q: I just remember that nobody from the Ministry of Agriculture could travel on the Cochran Program because he would not give them permission to do so. And, as I recall, it was because he at one point had sent his nephew, and we sent his nephew home.

THORBURN: That is probably correct. I don't remember that, but things worked like that there. Yes.

Q: Well, then, you retired out of Turkey.

THORBURN: Yes, I left Turkey and officially retired on the 20th of December, 1990. I flew from Ankara to Frankfurt, from Frankfurt to Tampa. A year and a half before that, I bought a home in Sarasota, Florida, and we loaded up a minivan with my two kids, 13 pieces of baggage and my dog and drove down to Sarasota.

Q: Well, in 35 years in the Foreign Agricultural Service, what do you think were the biggest changes that you saw come over the agency and its mission, and the flipside of that question, what are the things that strike you as having remained most the same?

THORBURN: Well, first of all, something that we have not discussed, I was the first colored professionaback then, we were colored, then we became black, and now we're African Americanthat FAS hired. And, as I had mentioned, Dr. Wilhelm Anderson decided that he would hire me because I appeared to be qualified, as everybody else. No other person, no other branch chief of division director, wanted to hire a colored person. So I was very, very pleased when I discovered later on that he had hired me. Two years later, Cline Warren, who was a graduate of Purdue, was hired. There was a period of 10 years before any other minority professionals were hired.

Q: Was that Frank Lee?

THORBURN: That was probably Frank Lee. I am not sure. And maybe Mattie Sharpless, but I'm not sure. Then, at that point, we had people going out to black universities to recruit people.

Q: Who initiated that, the idea of going out and recruiting from the 1890s? Was that Ray Ioanes, or somebody working for Ray Ioanes, because 1966 would have been when Ray Ioanes was administrator.

THORBURN: I would think it was Ray Ioanes. I don't know for sure, but the recruiting program started during his time, yes.

Q: Because Ray Ioanes was the one who wanted to professionalize the Foreign Service and really started going out looking for university graduates with degrees in agriculture.

THORBURN: Yes, and as a matter of fact, on Ray Ioanes also, he was working with the University of Maryland to develop a graduate program.

When I was hired, there were a few uncomfortable moments. As a matter of fact, OFAR had transitioned into FAS, and there was a filing system, and Ruth Donovan was responsible for setting up the new filing system in FAS. She didn't have enough help, so she asked the division directors and branch chiefs if they could provide someone, a secretary or administrative assistant, to spend some time, maybe over a period of a couple weeks, two hours a day, in order to help to structure and restructure the filing system, set it up properly.

Well, apparently, none of the secretaries or administrative assistants liked Ruth Donovan and wanted to work with Ruth Donovan. So, each section had to send somebody. So, being the most junior person there, someone suggested that Garth go over there, so Garth went over there. About an hour later, somebody from the administrator's office came down and said, “We didn't hire you to do filing.” I said, “Well, I was sent here. Speak to who was responsible for sending me here,” so things like that happened.

The interesting thing about FAS to me is there was Dr. Lois Bacon was the only female professional in FAS at that time.

Q: Dr. Who?

THORBURN: Lois Bacon. I don't remember what division she worked in, and it was completely male dominated. The only blacks that worked at FAS when I was there were in the code room, or the basement, mailroom. To see that we have incorporated into the agency women, Hispanics, Arabs, Native Americans, normal, run-of-the-mill Americans that we expect to see in a U.S. government agency. The USDA at that time, except for the county agents, and there were black county agents, was said to be one of the most racist agencies in the U.S. governmensaid to be. I don't know.

I went in there and I didn't have any problems, but this was what was said. To see the transition, where we have people of all ethnic groups in responsible positions in the agency, I think is an 180-degree turn.

Q: Then turning to things that have remained the same, what sorts of things have you seen that maybe some things that are good that they haven't changed, and maybe some things that we'd be better off if they had changed over those 35 years?

THORBURN: I think FAS has to be more flexible. When things change, when we need to change direction without having a complete shakeup of the agency, when this is not an important basin anymore, when Europe is not as important. We have the talent that we can spread out, move resources from point A to point B to point C. We're not being flexible in that area, and I think that's a mistake.

Q: Any other observations that you want to add, or any anecdotes, any stories you want to tell about any of your posts?

THORBURN: No, that's about it. Everything was hunky-dory if you let things roll off and do the job that you're supposed to do.

One little incident happened in Sao Paulo. I had forgotten about this. There were two. One is Sao Paulo and one in Brasilia. I was in Sao Paulo and an American farmer came in and wanted to speak to the agricultural officer about prospects, market prospects, for his product, Anna Lize Katz Bueno was my secretary, and she brought the guy in my office and he stood up and looked at me and said, “Are you the agricultural officer?”

I said, “Yes.” He said, “You're colored.” I said, “Yes.” He said, “You can't help me.” I said, “You're right.” So he turned around and left.

When I was in Brasilia, one night, about 3:00 in the morning, I had a knock on my door and an American farmer who had about 5,000 hectares in Mato Grosso, came in and

he was having serious problems with the Brazilians in his area, and he wanted me to help. It turned out that he was raising cattle. He had fenced in his area and the Brazilians in that area moved from point A to point B, across his land, anybody's land, and he put up a fence, and they cut the fence down. And he put up a fence, and they cut the fence down, and he went to the police, and, of course, the police's cousins, uncles, aunts and everything live in that area, so he got no help. So he wanted me to help him.

I said, “This is not an agricultural matter. This is a consular matter.” So I asked him to come back the next day, and we went to the consular section and we tried to get in touch with folks in that area. And about a couple of weeks later, I went up with him and we kind of resolved to have a swinging gate or something like that. But these people have been growing across this place for 400 years and this foreigner comes in and puts up fences and stuff like that. It was resolved without bloodshed.

Q: Cultural differences, going to Brazil and this sort of thing, where else did you see where you were able help Americans bridge some sort of a cultural gap, whether it was related to trade, or just living there, or what they were doing. India and Turkey are very different cultures from American culture, and, obviously, the culture of Latin America is very different.

THORBURN: Well, I think, and maybe to some extent you see it here in the United States, people, you have to know somebody, you have to have a link, speaking from an American point of view. You don't barge into a situatio“I'm American, I want this, I need that.” You have to massage. Sometimes massaging doesn't work well and you have to be forceful, but if you can roll with the punches and adapt to the culture, see how these people operate. Now, we are there to represent the United States. In many instances, the ambassadors that I have served with, get to the point where they think they are Indians or Brazilians or something, and, in my view, are not forceful enough in representing the United States. We're there to represent the United States. We're there to represent the U.S. farmer, the U.S. farm interests. And sometimes we lose sight of this by being, “Yes,

you know, let's work with the Indians more on this." And what this shows is a sign of weakness on our part. You can massage the situation, you can adapt to the culture, if you can use it, but never lose sight of why we are there and what we're supposed to do. It is rather difficult.

In Turkey, for instance, we would go out and sel'm sure you saw thil'd go to a small village where they had a poultry farm, and I'd go and talk to the fellow who was in charge. His wife and his daughter are out in the field in the tractor, working, and he would take me into the coffee shop and we had tea. At about 4:00, he'd go out there and bring them in. My wife used to go out with me and say, "Well, that's not fair." I'd say, "This is what they do."

Now, it wouldn't work for us, but it works for them. We would go into the village, and we were eating. We'd sit down on the floor, and there are no women around. They'd come and serve us. Don't say to the guy, "Why doesn't your wife come sit?" They don't do that. In that sense, this is where I'm saying we have to be flexible, because the culture is different.

Now, there was a lady who owns a few flour mills. I can't remember her name. When I went back to Turkey and I was with Susan Schayes. She is a very, very wealthy, very wealthy, Turkish person, and she's married to an American, and they've been married for about 25 years. They have two or three children, and she still has a problem with her husband, because he thinks in American terms and she thinks in Turkish terms. But they're in Turkey, and that's it. If they were in the United States, it would be different, but they're in Turkey. You have these clashes, but you have to know when to put the foot down and say no, but other times, if you can roll with the punches, you can get things done. My view.

Q: Good. Anything else?

THORBURN: When I was in Sao Paulo, the secretary of agriculture for the state of Sao Paulo was Oscar Thompson Filho, and Oscar Thompson Filho, what a name. It simply means son of Oscar Thompson, and we established a very good rapport.

When I went back to Brasilia as the agricultural attach#, Oscar Thompson Filho was the minister of agriculture, and I went there and the doors were open. So these things really, really work if you can establish good relationships where you are. You never know when you can use them again, and that worked very, very well, because then you had entr#e. I'd call up and say, “We're having problems with the foreign office and we want to work on this and somebody's coming from Washington. We need to discuss this. Can you soften them up for us?”

He said, “Garth, I'll see what I can do.” So those are the little things that are very, very useful from time to time.

End of interview